

Representatives Berry and Childers Seek Disaster Assistance for Southern Farmers

December 2, 2009

Washington, DC – Today, Representatives Marion Berry (AR-01) and Travis Childers (MS-01) introduced legislation to provide timely disaster assistance to producers facing severe crop loss from this fall's heavy rains and floods. Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-AR), Chairman of the United States Senate Committee on Agriculture and Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS) introduced companion legislation last week.

"In North Mississippi, both farmers and local economies have suffered from this season's unprecedented rainfall," said Childers. **"Significant assistance currently available through the USDA is still not enough to make up for the incredible crop losses local producers have experienced. While we await the full implementation of Farm Bill assistance provisions, this important legislation will help local economies stay afloat by providing farmers with the resources they need to get back on their feet."**

"Time and again Arkansas experiences the devastating effects of Mother Nature and this year she was especially hard on farmers across northeast Arkansas," said Berry. "During this difficult economic environment, it is imperative to help our farm families get the resources and federal support they need to recover from damages and losses to crops. While this funding is not the entire solution, it will provide additional resources to help some farmers make it through this growing season."

In Mississippi, 79 of 82 counties have been granted primary disaster designations by the USDA based on a minimum 30 percent loss for at least one crop in each county. Agriculture economists at Mississippi State University (MSU) estimate that state crop losses are nearing \$485 million, exceeding 30 percent of the state's overall crop value. Based on crop reports, MSU noted that nearly 64 percent of the state's sweet potatoes, 50 percent of cotton, 44 percent of soybeans, and 41 percent of grain sorghum will also be lost this year.

To date, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has designated more than half of

Arkansas's counties as primary natural disaster areas. The University of Arkansas's Division of Agriculture released a report estimating Arkansas crop losses for the 2009 harvest have risen to more than \$300 million. The report also shows a decline of nearly \$162 million in economic value-added, which encompasses soy, corn and rice processing, cotton ginning and reduced household spending by Arkansans whose incomes are tied to agriculture.

The legislation also includes \$650 million to assist specialty crop producers, \$150 million in assistance for livestock producers and \$42 million to aid first handlers of cottonseed.

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